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Quakerism on Nantucket

Since 1800,

..... BY

HENRY BARNARD WORTH.

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PREFACE.

The following essay was prepared for the purpose of indicating the causes that led to the melancholy disappearance of Friends from Nantucket. Facts were taken from original sources and statements of theological controversies, were quoted from books of unquestioned authority.

Some historical digressions were necessary to connect the movements of the Nantucket Meetings.

Terms used to designate different bodies of Friends which were derived from the names of prominent leaders are employed not in disrespect, but because no other terms are as clear.

HENRY B. WOOD

NEW BEDFORD, August 1, 1896.

F 11951.

P.3927



The Nantucket Historical Society, recently organized, has now 161 members, and 18 life members. Much enthusiasm is evinced regarding it, and the indications are that its work will soon prove both valuable and interesting to all lovers of our island. This number should be increased to at least five hundred. It is not proposed to limit the membership to natives. All who are of Nantucket descent, and all visitors who are interested, are also urged to join the society. Anyone may become a member by paying one dollar a year; a life member by the payment of fifteen dollars; and a life councilor for fifty dollars.

The Society appeals to all in sympathy with its object, to donate to it any document or relic of historical value. Copies of valuable documents will be of much service. Copies of genealogical records and coats of arms will be regarded as of special value. It also wishes to collect and preserve likenesses of all persons of Nantucket origin who have been of note, either at home or abroad. It will gather together relics of the Indians; all evidences of the early life of our people, and of the condition of the island from the earliest time. It will seek to perpetuate the history of its industries. The scope of the society will be much wider than that of any written history of the island. It is not too late to secure a collection of objects of much historical interest, that will grow more and more valuable in future years. Nantucket is a small island, but it has contributed in proportion to its size and population more than its share to the upbuilding of our country. We ought to preserve with honest pride the memory of all who have been of special service either to our own island or to the world. Communications should be addressed to

MISS SUSAN A. STARBUCK,

Corresponding Secretary.

CONDITION IN 1800.

The Society of Friends on the Island of Nantucket reached its highest tide of membership and influence a few years prior to the opening of the present century.

In the year 1792 they were using a meeting house located in the corner of their burying ground at the junction of Main and Saratoga streets. This building was erected in 1730, and here the Friends had met for over sixty years. This location was once central and convenient, but the members had now moved nearer Nantucket harbor and their success in business suggested a change. "11th mo., 28, 1791. The Friends' Meeting decided that the remote situation of our meeting house being found inconvenient it gave rise in this meeting to a proposition of removing to a place more central and the propriety of dividing the body of Friends if a second house should be found useful."

Two months later the committee reported favorably concerning both projects, "which being considered of is referred for further consideration to the next Monthly Meeting. In the meantime Friends are desired to invest their minds with due attention to the subject."

The next month was taken another cautious step. In order that the most careful consideration should be devoted to the subject and no feature overlooked, "2 mo., 27, 1792. This meeting appoints a committee of fourteen to investigate the expense of moving their meeting house and to enquire for a suitable place to build."

The next month the committee reported "it would cost to move the old building and build a second one 900 pounds. One piece of land was by David Coffin's and the other between Jethro Starbuck and John Gardner."

This report was accepted, and a building committee of twelve was chosen to receive conveyances of the lots and procure materials for a new house."

The conveyances, dated April 12, 1792, were taken in the names of Benjamin Barney, cooper, Jethro Mitchell, cooper, and Shubael Coffin, merchant, as overseers.

One lot was bounded on the north by a highway, on the east by another highway, on the south by land of David Coffin, and on the west by land of Richard Mitchell.

The streets of Nantucket were not then named.

This lot was at the southwest corner of Main and Pleasant streets, where the dwelling house of the late Benjamin Coffin now stands.

The other lot was "bounded on the south by a wide highway, on the east by land of Zacheus Macy, and west by land of Jethro Starbuck."

The "wide highway" is now Broad street, and on this lot now stands the residence of the late Eben W. Allen, directly east from the Ocean House.

These proceedings were well known to all the islanders. "The Congregational society having heard that the Friends were contemplating a change and that they might be put to some inconvenience for a place to meet in, passed a vote to offer the use of their meeting house to the Friends for the purpose of solemn worship whilst said removal might be accomplishing."

But that committee of twelve had not overlooked such an important contingency.

The meeting replied: "This meeting imprest with a due sense of their friendly intention & desirous to render them the acknowledgement do to so liberal & benevolent an offer, inform them that the necessity which they apprehend is not likely to take place, this meeting having concluded to build a new house previous to the removal of the old."

The new meeting house was fifty-six feet long and thirty-eight feet wide, and stood on the Broad street lot.

On the Main street lot the old meeting house was rebuilt.

Before the autumn of 1792 had passed the new house had been built and the old one removed. They paid for the change in two years.

"9 mo., 29, 1794. The building committee reported that they had completed building the new house and had moved the old one and had paid all the cost."

At this time the population of Nantucket was about 5600 and nearly one-half attended Friends Meeting.

DIVISION OF THE SOCIETY.

When the Friends had completed the change and had two meeting houses ready for use it became expedient to divide the membership into two bodies, each of which should attend a separate house.

Meetings for worship were larger than business meetings, for on First days many attended meeting who were not members. While they needed two meeting houses for worship, one was enough for business meetings.

They selected the most natural line for division, although it did not divide the members into two equal parts.

"12 mo., 31, 1792. The society is divided as follows: A line from the old wharf as far west as Sylvanus Starbuck's dwelling house (including said house with all who dwell on the south side of said street) beyond, taking its course in that direction to the shearing pen, with all who dwell to the south of said limits, to attend at the old meeting house, others to attend at the new meeting house."

This line began at the Straight Wharf and extended westerly through the entire length of Main street and its continuations to the ponds.

This division, however, was merely for convenience in worship. One corporation, the Nantucket Monthly Meeting, owned both buildings.

The business meetings were held in the Main street house.

Several meeting houses may belong to one Monthly Meeting.

Monthly Meetings of a certain section are governed by an organization called a Quarterly Meeting. This is composed of delegates from each Monthly Meeting.

The Yearly Meeting is the supreme body and meets once a year, and is composed of delegates from the Quarterly Meetings.

Nantucket Monthly Meeting belonged to the Sandwich Quarterly Meeting and to the New England Yearly Meeting.

Not long after the division, those members who were assigned to the Broad Street Meeting for worship desired to have a separate business meeting and to manage their affairs without connection with the Main Street Meeting. They desired to be a Distinct Monthly Meeting.

"1 mo., 27, 1794. The subject of a Distinct Monthly Meeting being allowed to the Friends who constitute the North Meeting referred to a committee."

"2 mo., 21, 1794. The committee after solid and weighty attention therein are generally of opinion it will be best for said Friends to be set off and be a Distinct Monthly Meeting."

The consent of the Sandwich Quarterly Meeting was obtained, and the Nantucket Monthly Meeting for the Northern District was duly organized.

10 mo., 27, 1794. The North Meeting met for the first time, with William Rotch as clerk and Jethro Mitchell as treasurer. As near as can be ascertained the North Meeting included about one-third of the Nantucket

Friends, but here were more persons of wealth than at the old meeting. The Mitchells, Rotchs, Rodmans, Gardeners, Joys and Swifts were members of this meeting.

When the nineteenth century opened there were two Quaker meetings largely attended and flourishing, and the only other sect on the island was still struggling and weak.

The Friends had evidently founded an enduring stronghold, and in the future were clear prospects of greater success.

“The men and women sat, the elder folk facing the younger, from their rising seats, with faces grave beneath the stiff straight brim or dusky bonnet. On the highest seats, where the low partition boards sundered the men and women, there alone sat they whom most the spirit visited and spake through them and gave authority.”

Yet unknown to themselves they had reached the pinnacle of their prosperity, and soon would begin the decline that would be steady and relentless, until they should disappear from the Island. They heeded not the clouds that warned them of coming storms, but condemning all change as dangerous, they sailed on in the cause given them two centuries before by George Fox, until stranded, shattered, and wrecked on one rock after another, they have almost vanished from the sea, and rival sects are now in undisputed dominion on the island.

If a vision of coming time could have been given them with its changes and sad decay, we cannot doubt that they would gladly endeavor to avert such a calamity. They would never have been willing to permit the labors of a century thus to come to naught. It is therefore not amiss to assume that they did not appreciate where their course would lead.

To-day a large part of the Friends have seen the errors of their ancestors, and have changed their course and are having some prosperity.

But scattered through the world are small struggling bodies that claim to keep the faith and practice of their ancestors without change, and although each year growing less and less, they cannot see that their forefathers were in any error. Such mistaken and misguided zeal seems unaccountable. They seem to hope that in some mysterious way they will be restored to their former power and prestige.

CAUSES OF DECLINE.

There were five principal causes that led to the decline of the Quaker society at Nantucket.

1. In the early years of this century considerable numbers of Nantucketers emigrated to Maine, New York and the West. Many of these were Friends, and their removal perceptibly reduced the Nantucket meetings.

2. The loss to Nantucket merchants by French Spoliations and the war of 1812 caused great financial change to the Nantucket Quakers. Their property entirely disappeared.

While it is true that Friends are under less expense than other people, yet there is great prestige in having wealthy persons among the members of a society. The losses by the Mitchells and Gardners and others must have had a depressing effect on the Nantucket Friends.

3. The literature of the year 1800 was very hostile to religious thought, and members who followed the sea could not help feeling its influence. They became indifferent when at home, and were disowned for not attending meetings.

4. The establishment of a Methodist society on the island, which met in the attic of a house on Fair street. Here was the same zeal that now characterizes the Salvation Army, and the place was called "Glory Hole."

Children of Friends were attracted by this vigorous religious body and left their parents' meeting.

"5 mo., 20, 1821. E. S. disowned for attending the Methodist church."

5. But the most potent cause of decline was the enforcement of their discipline. Here the Friends were unrelenting in disowning their members for acts not immoral. Their treatment was so severe that it brought discredit instead of respect, and on this account persons outside were disgusted.

There is in mankind a sense of fairness which accurately measures all penalties. This sense must not be offended if any religious body would obtain additions from those outside.

One Friend wrote: "It has been my lot to see many cases of disownment of members from which my own feelings revolted, and in which the benevolent feelings of valuable Friends appeared to have been violated to uphold the discipline. I have seen men of natural kindness and tendencies become hard hearted and severe. I have seen justice turned back and mercy laid aside."

At Nantucket, while the highest penalty was excommunication, it was considered a great loss and disgrace, although the accused was conscious of no wrong. Then there were no degrees in the penalties. Disownment was the only penalty for all offences great and small.

A few quotations will now be given of accusations for which persons were disowned. They are samples of large classes.

"2 mo., 27, 1800. Henry Barnard had gone to sea in an armed vessel."

If they had known that he joined the Freemasons five years before, he would have been disowned sooner for that.

"1 mo., 28, 1801. L. H. was disowned for deviating from our principles in dress and address."

He persisted in wearing buckles, and refused to say "thee" and "thou."

"2 mo., 25, 1801. D. C. had married a member of another society, and J. J. was keeping company with a man not in membership with us and attended a place where there was music and dancing."

"10 mo., 28, 1801. Levi Joy was living in Hudson, New York, though still a member of the Nantucket Meeting. The Nantucket Meeting requested the Hudson Meeting to treat with him on account of a charge that he had joined the Freemasons. That meeting replied that Joy denied being a member of that society. This evasive reply was promptly rejected and the Hudson Meeting informed 'that the time and place of his initiation among them and the circumstances of the case have been ascertained,' and requested them to investigate further. Several months afterward the Hudson Meeting replied that 'Joy admitted that he was once among the Freemasons in their embodied capacity, and never but once, and had no desire to meet with them again in like manner,' and suggested that he be pardoned, which was done."

"7 mo., 6, 1803. H. C. had deviated in dress and address from the plainness of our profession, and F. H. had deviated from our principles in dress, particularly in tying the hair."

"4 mo., 30, 1806. D. G. had gone out in marriage with a woman in New York."

"11 mo., 29, 1806. H. B. G. had attended a marriage performed by a minister, where there was music and dancing, in which he was a partaker."

"10 mo., 31, 1810. N. M. attended a marriage performed by a minister."

"3 mo., 26, 1812. M. R. had been dealing in and handling spirituous liquors."

"11 mo., 25, 1815. S. C. had sailed in a privateer."

"10 mo., 29, 1818. H. G. had partaken too freely of spirituous liquors."

"5 mo., 31, 1821. W. G. H. joined a company at a hall and was concerned in a lottery."

"7 mo., 25, 1821. A. F. had permitted his daughter to be married in his dwelling house by a minister."

"5 mo., 30, 1822. C. G. C. had married a woman not a member."

And yet for over half a century afterward he was one of Nantucket's most kindly and benevolent citizens and prominently connected with the Coffin school and Athenæum.

"5 mo., 31, 1824. L. C. had neglected the meetings and frequented those of the Methodist society."

Such were the austerities of their discipline.

Dishonorable failures were promptly condemned.

"3 mo., 26, 1812. E. M. had launched into business beyond his ability and cannot pay his just debts."

"6 mo., 9, 1813. S. M. had failed in the performance of his promises and cannot pay but a small dividend."

It must not be concluded that such severity existed solely in Nantucket. It was everywhere the same.

Persons marrying contrary to the society's rules were disowned unless they repented in writing. One woman said she was disowned for the best act of her life.

In one case parents were forbidden to bequeath property to such a child who had been disowned.

One physician was disowned for certifying that certain soldiers were disabled by wounds and suitable for pensions.

At one period Friends thought it justifiable to visit their members and with instruments remove ornaments from furniture.

It was common practice for Friends to attend marriages

of their Gentile acquaintances, if only they were out of the room when the marriage ceremony was being performed.

Once over thirty persons left the room and returned after the marriage had been performed by a minister, and thus escaped disownment.

A prominent English Quakeress said: "I cannot deny that much as I love the principles of Quakerism, bitter experience has proved to me that Friends do rest too much in externals, and that valuable as are many of them yet there are also serious evils in our society among its members. These cause me real anxiety and pain and reconcile me to so many of my children being disowned."

The far-reaching consequences of these numerous disownments were never measured or considered. Ties of blood and marriage are always strong. If a member of a family was set aside for some frivolous offence, others of the family were likely to follow, and those disowned usually went to another meeting.

These losses were not compensated by additions, for leaving out of account children of Quaker parentage who were members by birth, other additions were not over one in five years, while the disownments were often fifty a year.

Although it is difficult to estimate the exact loss to the Quaker society on account of any particular cause, yet the influential cause was the enforcement of unnatural regulations regarding marriage. In this particular, experience shows that the human heart generally without restraint follows its own inclinations. Sometimes education, public opinion, and persuasion may exert an influence on the choice, but compulsory requirements never will succeed. It has been stated without objection that fully one-third of the Friends who married before 1850 chose partners not members of the society, and thus lost their membership.

Of these almost none are reinstated, for having committed no moral offence, and being disowned for an act that may have added greatly to their happiness they have no wish to return to a body towards which they entertain only feelings of disgust.

From the beginning of this century to the present time such marriages have increased in frequency, and the fact that disownment for this course is now mentioned as a joke is a proof of the impotency of the penalty.

In relation to this discipline it should be stated that in New England at this time are three sects of Quakers.

1. The Nantucket Meeting.
2. The Wilburite Meeting.
3. The Gurney Meeting, or New England Yearly Meeting.

The censorious discipline is now carried out in its fullness by the first two.

In the Gurney body has been a great change. In the last book of discipline published by the New England Yearly Meeting marrying non-members is no cause for disownment. Attending meetings of other societies is not forbidden, and dress is no longer a subject for discipline. Members may belong to secret societies if "the cause of truth do not suffer," and they can hold public office.

Before 1852 a Quaker burial ground resembled a pasture lot or hay field. Now there are seen grave stones fifteen inches high.

Formerly there were twenty-seven causes for disownment, not including crimes. Now there are eleven delinquencies for which members *may be* set aside.

In the Friends school at Providence, Rhode Island, which is managed by the New England Yearly Meeting, are provided for use of the students nine pianos, and music, vocal and instrumental, are on their curriculum. All these departures have been made in recent years in the New England Yearly Meeting of Friends.

In a recent number of an English periodical in the interest of the strict class of Friends mention was made of honors conferred in English universities on children of Quaker parentage. One of these had taken first honors in insrtumental music.

Thus they reduced their membership in excess of the additions. The interest of members in their meetings was sadly declining.

Instead of two strong flourishing meetings, as at the opening of the century, there were at Nantucket two remnants, and it was thought best to combine them. The weakest body was at Broad street. It was therefore decided to discontinue it.

"5 mo., 13, 1829. The Nantucket Meeting for the Northern District was dissolved and its property and members transferred to the old meeting."

The Broad street meeting house was used as a place of worship until September, 1833, when it was sold by the Friends. It was afterwards rebuilt and became a part of the beautiful Trinity Episcopal church, which was burned in the fire of 1846.

Such was the irony of Fate. A Quaker meeting was discontinued and its house of worship transformed into an Episcopal church, where the High Church ceremonies prevailed and the rector was a zealous disciple of Newman and the Tractarians.

THE HICKSITE STRUGGLE.

During the first thirty years of this century disownments were based exclusively on irregularities or omissions in conduct.

None had been disowned on account of doctrinal views, but now a new and more insidious foe had appeared and was walking about the land. It had paused at Philadelphia and New York, and had carried away captive large

numbers of Friends. Some of these in New York had relatives at Nantucket. Stalwart Friends in New York and Philadelphia, who had withstood the enemy, warned their brethren at Nantucket, who had time to prepare for the expected invasion. Several years they waited, and at last in the summer of 1830 it appeared on the island. It was merely a Hicksite preacher, but that meant a mountain.

Elias Hicks, a Quaker Minister after a long ministry, was charged with teaching false doctrines. He lived on Long Island and carried on farming. His power as an orator has been likened to that of Webster and Everett. In his published sermons certain stalwart Friends in Philadelphia discovered evidences that Hicks doubted the inspiration of the Bible, the deity of the Messiah, and the personality of the devil. So they led against him a fierce attack, which continued several years and resulted in a division of the society in Baltimore and Pennsylvania, and New York, in which a larger part approved Hicks' views and the smaller body remained orthodox. This was the first rift in the Quaker society. Each part claimed to hold the truth.

On the controverted points Hicks denied that he held any views different from George Fox, who was the standard. Judged by his sermons, Hicks was as orthodox as one-half of the Protestant clergy of to-day.

It seems that in the early summer of 1830 a Hicksite minister visited Nantucket and appointed a meeting to be held in some building not a church. Quite likely he came from New York and was welcomed by the relatives of his New York Friends. Some of the members of the Nantucket Meeting "publicly gave countenance to this affair by assisting the minister to procure a meeting house other than that of Friends for a meeting called by that person not in unity with Friends, and they attended that

meeting, for which breaches of order no satisfaction was obtained from them."

Friends could punish any disorderly conduct. So all that became necessary was to call any objectionable act a "disorder" and it could be punished. By the experience of several years, Friends in Nantucket were advised that this was the only safe way to deal with the Hicksite movement. If any member was discovered leaning that way, call him "disorderly" and disown him. It is altogether likely that the minister was known to them as a Hicksite by reputation. The only other fact was to ascertain who gave him any welcome and call it a "disorder" and disown them. So eager were they to throttle the invading monster that they never even charged that their members approved the minister's preaching.

To punish these acts as "disorderly" was easy, summary and effective, even if unjust. A busy summer followed.

Gilbert Coffin, Silvanus Macy, Roland Hussey, Obed Barney, Daniel Mitchell, William B. Coffin, Charles Pitman, Gideon Swain, Matthew Myrick, William Watson, Thomas Macy, Peter Macy, Obed Macy, and their wives and others had been in some way connected with the Hicksite meeting and were disowned. These persons were prominent and influential and were a loss to the meeting, both in membership and prestige.

Nowhere else in New England did the Hicksite movement appear, and the reason for its appearance at Nantucket may be that the Hicksite leaders in New York City had relatives in Nantucket whom they had probably made familiar with Hicks' views.

It is estimated that of the whole Friends society in the world two-fifths became Hicksites. In Nantucket the number scarcely reached one-fifth.

The Nantucket Hicksites organized a meeting under the Westbury Quarterly Meeting on Long Island, and March

23, 1833, through their overseers, Gilbert Coffin, Obed and Peter Macy, purchased a lot on Main street, where now stands the residence of William T. Swain. On this lot they erected a large meeting house, where they met several years. When their members became reduced the meeting house property was sold, and the building was afterwards used for the straw business and was called Atlantic Hall. A few years ago it was taken down and is now the middle section of Hotel Nantucket. The members who were left mostly attended the Unitarian Church, lending some credit to the popular impression that Hicksites are Unitarian Quakers.

Thus the Nantucket Meeting successfully liberated themselves from those they considered heretical parasites. It had been done quickly and easily. They did in two months what was pending several years in Philadelphia.

Elias Hicks visited Nantucket in June, 1793, nearly thirty years before his name became associated with false doctrines.

REMOVAL TO FAIR STREET.

The Friends had not the control of the island as in former years.

The Methodists had two churches, one on lower Fair Street and the other on corner of Centre and Liberty Streets. Here was fiery preaching, lively music and delirious excitement called "slaying power."

Imagine the horror of those solid Friends at hearing that one of their members had attended a revival at the "Teaser" meeting house!

A Universalist society had become organized and had bought land for a meeting house.

The North Congregational church was crowded and they were contemplating building a larger meeting house. Here and also at the Second Congregational Meeting

House on Orange street, now called Unitarian, was cultured preaching and Puritan music. "Solid men sat in the pews. Every Sunday millions of money listened to the preachers. The Unitarians were rich enough to build their church of mahogany."

These were powerful forces and drew many from the Friends society.

It was decided in the spring of 1833 to seek a different location. The meeting house on Main street was no longer convenient. So their overseers, Samuel Macy, Hezekiah Swain, Zenas Gardner, Cromwell Barnard, Kimball Starbuck, Prince Gardner, Laban Paddock, Peleg Mitchell and Charles G. Stubbs, purchased a lot on the west side of Fair street, between Ray's court and Moore's lane. On the south part of the lot was erected a meeting house, and in the building on the north side of the lot was maintained a Friends school, where at one time John Boadle taught down stairs and Alice Mitchell upstairs.

The meeting house stood where now is the residence of William M. Barrett, and the schoolhouse and lot are the property of the Nantucket Historical Association.

"9 mo., 1, 1833. The new meeting house was used. The old meeting house was sold to Charles G. and Henry Coffin, and the building removed to the Commercial wharf for a warehouse."

A singular experience befell one of these overseers.

"6 mo., 27, 1833. Cromwell Barnard was drawn on the jury and inadvertently administered a formal oath to a witness. The meeting heard of it, and excused him only after he had made a written acknowledgement of his error."

"4 mo., 26, 1835. A library of one hundred thirty-nine books was placed in the meeting house."

It was evidently thought that if suitable literature could

be read by Friends some of the hostile influences of that day would be counteracted and members held faithful to the meeting.

But notwithstanding all efforts to the contrary, during the decade from 1835 to 1845 there was a continually increasing indifference. Many were disowned for marrying contrary to the rules of the society and for not attending meetings. Their numbers were fast diminishing.

“8 mo., 31, 1843. Maria Mitchell, daughter of William Mitchell, was disowned because she had neglected the meetings, and told the committee that her mind was not settled on religious subjects and that she had no wish to retain her right in membership.”

The beauty of a thousand stars in the canopy of heaven was more congenial.

The meeting was losing its power and prestige. The force and influence of Quaker principles were on the wane. Some dread catastrophe was casting its shadow before.

Those who had met the Hicksite invasion into New England, conquered it and seen it disappear from the island were now called to a more disheartening conflict. Their victory over the Hicksites had been easy, for they had the support of all the Friends in New England, but in the coming contest every meeting in New England would be against them, and they would themselves be conquered.

The new enemy had already appeared even before the end of the Hicksite movement, but the attention of Friends was so engrossed by the latter that it for a time overshadowed the former. Thus when the Hicksite struggle was ended and the two parties had separated, the Orthodox American Friends turned their attention towards the new heresy that was progressing in England and America.

About the year 1818 a systematic study of the Scriptures

and catechising thereon was introduced in the Friends school at Ackworth. Joseph John Gurney is stated to have been the chief promoter of this change. His attempt to encourage a study of the Scriptures as the sole guide in religion brought on him severe attacks by Friends, who asserted that the Inner Light being the Divine Spirit shedding its light in the human heart was the primary guide and the Scriptures were secondary.

Here began the thirty years' struggle commonly known as the Gurneyite movement, although it became well defined not before 1832.

THE GURNEY DIVISION.

Joseph John Gurney was the son of a wealthy English Quaker family; was highly educated in English universities, and by his eloquence and polished discourse became a preacher of great power in the Quaker society, and gained great popularity both in England and America. His sermons contained statements from which the stalwart American Friends decided that here was a man more dangerous than Elias Hicks.

They asserted that Friends could not tell beforehand what the spirit would direct them to do in a meeting, and as they were not moved until assembled in meeting there could be no preparation. There was no priest, no sacrament, no liturgy, no hymn book, not even a Bible. It was an assembly of human souls gathered in solemn stillness, waiting until God should speak through one of them to the rest. If a minister was discovered making any preparation for a meeting, she was said to be "going before her guide," and she was deposed and silenced. With this cardinal principle emphasized and reiterated on all possible occasions, it was with great uneasiness that American Friends learned that Gurney actually carried a Bible

to meeting and read from it. They also claimed that he prepared his discourses beforehand. This was not Quaker dependence on the Holy Spirit. The error of Hicks was in repudiating the Bible. The error of Gurney was in repudiating the Spirit. Gurney therefore was as dangerous as the other, and in 1838 the American Friends began a seven years' conflict with the purpose of having Gurney silenced by the London Yearly Meeting. Every movement must have a leader, and these persons attacking Gurney selected John Wilbur of Hopkinton, Rhode Island, whose vigor and rigor proved entirely adequate to the occasion.

Gurney visited most of the meetings in America and Europe and met with great success. He visited Nantucket July, 1838, and was the guest of Cromwell Barnard.

Wilbur by voice and pen met with less success, for in Great Britain all the meetings had approved Gurney's preaching.

The bitterest contest was carried on in New England. It seems that Wilbur differed from Gurney in only four particulars :

1. Whether justification precedes or follows sanctification?

2. The true reason for observing the first day of the week instead of the seventh.

3. Whether in the next world will be given natural or spiritual bodies?

4. Whether the Holy Spirit or the Bible is the true religious guide?

The first three points in dispute are entirely unessential and any discussion of them would be without profit.

George Fox taught that the Holy Spirit could be received by believers so as to become an Inner Light, making clear the path to follow, and that no other guide was as infallible. The Bible was of secondary importance.

Until the time of Gurney emphasis was placed on the Inner Light, instead of the Bible, but Gurney discovered an inconsistency among the Friends. Ministers had been accused of teaching false doctrine. They claimed to speak what the spirit taught them, and yet they were condemned by the society of Friends and their teaching was proved to be false by quotations from the Bible. If a man's light differed from the Bible, he was judged not to have the true light. If, therefore, the Bible was the final authority, Gurney recommended that it be so considered; that it be carefully studied by young and old; that Bible schools be established; that societies be organized for the wider circulation of the Scriptures. Some of Gurney's friends in England joined with a number of Episcopal bishops in the formation of a Bible society. This was highly offensive to the stalwart American Friends.

Thus did the bitterest of conflicts proceed, and New England became divided into two bitter factions, the Gurneyites and Wilburites.

The crisis was reached in 1845 at Newport in the New England Yearly Meeting.

In several of the Quarterly and Monthly Meetings, there had been divisions into Wilburite and Gurneyite bodies, each claiming to be the true organization. These and other matters came before the Yearly Meeting, the court of last resort for final adjudication.

The larger part of the prominent Nantucket Friends had joined the Wilbur party, and were ready in the Yearly Meeting to offer stout resistance to the advance of the Gurney party.

It was evident that the Yearly Meeting had overwhelmingly adopted the views of Gurney, and if majorities had ruled, as in other bodies, the Wilbur party would have had little opportunity to be heard.

Owing to a curious feature in the government of the

Quaker society, a small minority has an opportunity to make a vigorous and often successful contest. It arises in the selection of a clerk for the meeting, whose power is almost supreme. Usually in secular bodies the first struggle is to obtain a majority in number, and then the majority by vote controls all subsequent matters. But in a Friends' Meeting there is no chairman and no voting; consequently numbers do not count.

The clerk decides what is the sense of the meeting and then he "makes a minute of it," or makes a record of it.

When a Friends' Meeting is to take action the clerk announces the subject and awaits the expression of the members. After all the members that wish have expressed themselves the clerk thereupon decides what is the solid weighty sense of the meeting. It may not be the view of the majority; but taking into account the age, piety, experience and position of those expressing themselves he decides what is the view of the solid and weighty members. This view must be what he thinks most sensible. The sense of the meeting may become the view of the clerk.

The difficulty and delicacy of the duty imposed on the clerk of collecting and recording the judgment of the meeting without a vote being taken is so great that in times of excitement and conflicting opinions few persons can be found competent to the task, for however impartial the clerk it is always difficult for him not to be influenced by his own views and sympathies. It therefore follows from this that the clerk may declare the judgment of the meeting to be according to the view of the minority, and so the minority governs the meeting. This actually happened in the city of Philadelphia.

Nor does his power end here, for having decided what is the sense of the meeting whatever record the clerk makes is conclusive and can never be altered, corrected or

changed. With such an opportunity for the minority to govern a few are often encouraged to convince the clerk that their view is the sensible one, and if successful he will make a minute in their favor. It should be stated that when there is a great difference of opinion among the members an impartial clerk will make a minute postponing the subject till the next meeting, but usually the clerks in times of excitement are not so impartial but decide in favor of one party.

The first act at the opening of a new meeting is to elect a new clerk. For this purpose the old clerk presides. Whichever party he favors will thereafter control the organization. For with a clerk in their favor a few could overcome a multitude. Such a decisive advantage is this that the entire contest in a division is waged on this point. If a contesting party cannot elect their clerk they always withdraw. This is their way of settling a division.

At this session of the Yearly Meeting the Wilburites, under the leadership of Prince Gardner of Nantucket, tried to secure the selection of Thomas B. Gould of Newport as clerk, but the clerk of the previous year, who was to decide the sense of the meeting, being a Gurneyite, found the sense of the meeting to be that he himself should continue to be clerk. When he made this minute the Wilburites withdrew to a Baptist Church near by and organized what they called the New England Yearly Meeting.

Several years later the Supreme Court of Massachusetts was sought to pass upon the respective rights of these two meetings.

There is in Fall River on North Main Street a plain white building, which in 1844 belonged to the Swansea Monthly Meeting, which was largely Gurneyite. This meeting divided into two bodies, the Gurney body

being much larger, each claiming to be the true Swansea Monthly Meeting, and both selected overseers, who are the officers to take charge of the societies' property.

The Wilburite overseers succeeded in getting control of the Fall River meeting house and would not surrender it. The matter was carried to the Quarterly Meeting, but here was a division. There was a Gurney Quarterly Meeting and a Wilbur Quarterly Meeting. So the Yearly Meeting was called upon to decide the controversy. But as here was also a division a suit was brought in the courts of Massachusetts by the Gurney overseers for possession of the Fall River meeting house. The Supreme Court, in a lengthy opinion, decided that the Gurney Yearly Meeting was the true meeting and that the Wilburites were seceders, and so not entitled to any of the property of the meeting which they had left. Moreover it was there stated by Judge Shaw that the unhappy division between the Wilburites and Gurneyites arose from an apprehension of the former that the latter were disseminating false doctrines, "of which," he said, "there was no evidence."

The points of difference seem to be exceedingly trivial, and one Friend told me that the real cause for the ill will which John Wilbur entertained towards Gurney was due to the fact that when Wilbur visited England he was not allowed to smoke in Gurney's house.

Thus was accomplished in the New England Yearly meeting a division into two bodies, of which the Gurney body comprised about nine-tenths of the meeting.

After the contest between the two bodies in the Yearly Meeting at Newport some of the Wilbur party took a trip to Nantucket. At a first day meeting Thomas B. Gould arose to preach. Cromwell Barnard, who was the leading Gurney advocate at Nantucket, interrupted him, saying: "Friend, thee can sit down." Peleg Mitchell then said:

“Friend, thee can go on.” Other elders expressed their views. Women were greatly agitated and in tears, and some went out. Gould continued and finished his discourse.

This disturbance indicated clearly how the two parties were arrayed, although there had been no separation. It was evident that a separation would result, and it was also certain that Cromwell Barnard, William Mitchell and Abram R. Wing would lead one body, and that Prince Gardner and Peleg Mitchell the other. Soon after the occasion offered and the result was decisive.

The division took place in July, 1845, when the Sandwich Quarterly Meeting, which was largely Gurneyite, met in Nantucket, but the Nantucket delegates were Wilburites.

When the meeting was opened reports from every Monthly Meeting were presented except Nantucket, although the Nantucket delegates were present, also John Wilbur and some of his Friends. When the report of the Nantucket Meeting was requested Hezekiah Barnard stated that he had the report but they had concluded to withhold it, adding “that a separation must and would take place.” An attempt was then made to appoint Peleg Mitchell as clerk. This was opposed by the Gurney party, as he had been identified with the separatists at Newport. John Wilbur and his friends when requested would not leave the hall, so the Quarterly Meeting adjourned until 4 o’clock in the afternoon. In the meantime the Wilbur party had remained and organized what they called the Sandwich Quarterly Meeting. At 4 o’clock, when the adjourned meeting reassembled, the Wilburites had gone.

The Nantucket Meeting had thus withdrawn from the Quarterly Meeting, but there were members of the Nantucket Meeting that remained loyal. They were in

sympathy with Gurney. The Quarterly Meeting encouraged them to continue the Monthly Meeting, which was accordingly done in July, 1845.

There was effected a division of the Nantucket Meeting into a Gurney body and a Wilbur body. It is stated by the Gurney body that they numbered 88 and that the Wilbur body numbered 140, and that 79 were either at sea or feeble, and were doubtful. Assuming that the doubtful ones were equally divided between the two bodies there would have been about 130 Gurney and 180 Wilbur Friends. So the stalwarts at Nantucket were in the majority, which was not true in any other meeting in New England.

The Supreme Court decision in the case of the Fall River meeting house leaves no doubt that the Wilbur body were separatists and the Gurney body were true continuing Friends, and as such entitled to all the property. The matter of property will be dealt with again in connection with the meetings, each of which will now be treated separately. Before the separation the meeting had property that cost \$21,000. This was held by the Fair Street Friends, together with many volumes of records of births, deaths, marriages, and doings of the meetings from their commencement to that date. These records while on Nantucket were not allowed to be examined by any one not a member.

NANTUCKET MONTHLY MEETING (GURNEY).

Those Nantucket Friends who continued loyal to the New England Yearly Meeting, under the advice of the Sandwich Quarterly Meeting, met in the house of Cromwell Barnard and denominated themselves the Nantucket Monthly Meeting of Friends. As Peleg Mitchell had identified himself with the other body he was adjudged no longer suitable as clerk, and in his place was chosen

his brother William, and a demand was made to the Fair Street Meeting for the records, meeting house and other property, to which demand no attention was given. They then appointed Cromwell Barnard, Obed Fitch and Kimball Starbuck overseers, Abram R. Wing recorder, and Seth Mitchell treasurer.

"8 mo., 2, 1845. The committee reported that they had secured the house recently occupied by Elizabeth Chase on Winter street, which is in readiness for our meeting to-morrow."

This was the Abner Coffin house and stood where is now the Coffin school.

"1 mo., 1, 1846. The committee had seen the agent of the Main street house built by the Hicksites, and he had agreed to let this meeting have it for \$150 per year."

Here they continued to meet until November 28, 1850, when the meeting house on Center street had been completed.

Aside from attending to their own business, the Gurney meeting was now required to deal with the Friends who had separated. So a book was procured and in it were written the names of all the members before the separation. They then proceeded to disown those who attended the Fair Street Meeting.

The following were among those disowned because they withdrew from fellowship with the New England Yearly Meeting : —

Frederick Arthur,
Mary Arthur,
James Austin,
John Boadle,
Hezekiah Barnard,
Mary Barnard,
Susan Barnard,
Alexander G. Coffin,

Rachel Hussey,
David G. Hussey,
Elizabeth Hussey,
Benjamin Hussey,
Gorham Hussey,
Lydia M. Hussey,
Hepsibeth C. Hussey,
Nancy Hussey,

John L. Coffin,	Lydia G. Hussey,
Joseph G. Coleman,	Lydia Monroe,
Phebe Coffin,	Alice Mitchell,
Rebecca Coffin,	Moses Mitchell,
Susan Coffin,	David Mitchell,
John G. Coffin,	Peleg Mitchell,
Elizabeth Coffin,	Mary S. Mitchell,
John Franklin Coleman	Susan Mitchell,
Eliza Coleman,	Mary Macy,
Anna Clark,	Deborah Paddack,
James B. Coleman,	Eunice Paddack,
Lydia Coleman,	Laban Paddack,
Elizabeth Clark,	Mary Paddack,
Sally Easton,	John Paddack,
Eliza Ann Easton,	Sarah Paddack,
John Folger,	Micajah Swain,
Lydia Folger,	Hezekiah Swain,
Hannah Maria Gardner,	Lydia Swain,
Prince Gardner,	Obed B. Swain,
Mary Gardner,	Eunice Swain,
Benjamin Gardner,	Margaret Swain,
Rachel Gardner,	Joseph B. Swain,
Elizabeth Gorham,	Richard G. Swain.

The property held by the Fair Street Meeting comprised the meeting house, poor house, burial ground, the old records, and about \$7000. Possession could only be obtained by a law suit, and this the Yearly Meeting discouraged, as it would be a contest in which relatives would be at strife with relatives. The records were never afterwards demanded, and remained in the custody of the Fair Street Friends.

In 1864 the Fair Street real estate was sold and the proceeds divided between the two meetings. The money was divided by agreement.

According to the decision of the courts, the Fair Street Meeting had lost their rights to the burial ground. But this was not enforced, and the Fair Street Friends were permitted to use the south end and the others used the north end. So there are grave stones in the north part, but none in the south part.

The members of the Gurney Meeting lost heavily by the great fire of 1846, and they were compelled to request assistance from the Quarterly Meeting. After this they improved in financial strength, and in May, 1850, a committee was appointed to select the location of a meeting house. The next month they reported that a lot on Center Street would cost \$500 and one on Liberty street would cost \$350, and considering the cost they recommended the Liberty Street lot, where is now the residence of David W. Burgess. But for reasons not known the Center Street lot was selected, and November 28, 1850, William Mitchell and Herman Crocker reported that they had completed building the new meeting house, which cost separate from the land nearly \$1500.

An important addition to their numbers in 1857 was Christopher C. Hussey, who withdrew in 1860, and became a prominent clergyman in the Unitarian Church.

The Center Street Meeting continued until 1866. Its membership became so reduced and scattered that it was deemed best to discontinue it, and its last meeting was held January 10, 1867, when it decided to be dissolved and transferred with all its property to the New Bedford Monthly Meeting.

This property comprised : —

1. Meeting house, Center Street.
2. Interest in Friends' Asylum.
3. One share in the old North Wharf.
4. Burial ground held with Fair Street Friends.
5. Cash, four hundred and fifty dollars.

The Center Street property is still owned by the New Bedford Monthly Meeting, and is used for worship whenever thought desirable.

During the thirty-two years of its existence five marriages took place in the Center Street Meeting.

1847.

Edward Sutton to Sarah Gale.

Moses Farnham to Mary B. Allen.

1850.

Samuel P. Johnson to Martha Hussey.

1857.

Presbrey Wing to Sarah Barker.

Owen Dame to Eliza C. Mitchell.

Thomas Macy, who was disowned as a Hicksite twenty-eight years before, in 1858 became a member of this meeting.

At the present time there remain but two members who were enrolled in the organization in July, 1845—Matthew Barney and William Hosier.

FAIR STREET MEETING (WILBUR).

After the separation in 1845 and the Gurney body had organized its meeting, it was at once denominated "spurious" by the Fair Street Friends, and all who attended it were disowned from the Wilbur body.

Among those disowned were the following, viz. :

Elizabeth Austin,
Cromwell Barnard,
Susanna Coleman,
Deborah Coffin,

Miriam Starbuck,
Abigail Allen,
Matthew Barney,
Lydia Bunker,

Lydia Coffin,
 Lydia Fish,
 Hannah Gardner,
 Robert B. Hussey,
 Hannah Hussey,
 Judith Hussey,
 Cyrus Hussey,
 Lydia Hussey,
 Benjamin Mitchell,
 William Mitchell,

Robert Coffin,
 Herman Crocker,
 George Easton,
 William Hosier,
 Lydia Hosier,
 Obed Fitch,
 Kimball Starbuck,
 Rachel Swain,
 Abram R. Wing,
 Lydia Worth.

Having cleared their garments of the spurious Gurney-ites the Fair Street Meeting, although reduced in numbers, cheerfully travelled on like Gideon's famous army which, though reduced from thirty thousand to three hundred, yet put the enemy to flight.

The most prominent minister, Christopher C. Hussey, was disowned for doctrinal reasons and afterwards became a member of the Gurney Meeting.

Disownments for all the ancient causes were accomplished as often as an instance occurred.

In 1856. One member failed to pay his just debts and otherwise conducted his pecuniary affairs in a disreputable manner.

1858. Two brothers had married women not members.

1862. A member had been sailing in an armed vessel and engaged in war.

1864. A member had neglected the meetings and allowed a musical instrument in his house, and permitted his daughter to practice thereon.

1868. Several members neglected the meeting.

1869. A member married a man out of the meeting.

1871. Three members were attending meetings of another society.

1873. One member for neglecting meetings and one for marrying out of the meeting.

- 1874. A member had neglected the meetings.
- 1877. A member had neglected the meetings.
- 1878. A member had neglected the meetings.
- 1891. A member had neglected the meetings.
- 1892. A member had married a man out of the meeting.

Since 1845 ten marriages took place.

- 1847. Samuel D. Otis to Elizabeth Gorham.
- 1847. John Folger to Phebe Coffin.
- 1849. William McKeel to Mary Gorham.
- 1850. Obed B. Swain to Susan Hussey.
- 1854. John Boadle to Hannah M. Heaton.
- 1855. Benjamin Tucker to Mary S. Paddack.
- 1870. William McKeel to Martha G. Hussey.
- 1876. Thomas Leigh to Elizabeth Foster.
- 1878. Morton A. Wamesly to Abbie L. Chase.
- 1887. John H. Foster to Mary E. Sinkinson.

A singular incident is recorded concerning the ministry of Narcissa B. Coffin.

"10 mo., 24, 1858. This meeting after a time of weighty deliberation has united with the women in approving the gift and public appearance in the ministry of Narcissa B. Coffin."

"7 mo., 28, 1864. She was deposed and silenced by the Nantucket Meeting 'for not keeping on the watch and abiding in a state of humility and abasedness of self.'"

She was a woman of a high order of ability, and none ever came into her presence without receiving a delightful impression. The Quaker society at Nantucket was fortunate in having a person among their members who could so persuasively present the principles of Quakerism, and they were indeed rich if they could dispense with the services of such a woman. Inquiry was made for the reason she was deposed. Answer was made that she went

"before her guide." This may have meant that she made preparation beforehand for some sermon.

8 mo., 28, 1889. After twenty-five years of silence Narcissa B. Coffin was restored to her ministry in the Nantucket Meeting.

This was done in a dwelling house in Lynn, and it ought not to remain unrecorded that they were all dead who silenced her a quarter of a century before. She immediately conducted a most successful missionary tour through the Scandinavian peninsular, giving strong evidence of the great amount of work she had been compelled to leave undone.

After the separation in 1845, the Wilbur party organized meetings throughout New England wherever their numbers would allow, and these were called "smaller bodies," in distinction from the large Gurney bodies. These "smaller bodies" in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Central New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania were in unity with each other, when another curious division took place that exerted an important influence on the Nantucket Meeting.

The controversy occurred in the Central New York Meeting at Scipio in relation to a publication by that meeting of the journal of Joseph Hoag. In the original work Hoag had made some remarks derogatory to the temper and judgment of Job Otis, who lived in New Bedford during the early part of this century, and then moved to Scipio and continued to be one of the strictest of American Friends. He was highly respected by those whose censorious tastes inclined them toward a rigid and severe discipline. Hoag was a Quaker minister of great fame, whose views were not unlike those of Otis, but whose temper and judgment were much more pacific.

In 1858 the Scipio Yearly Meeting decided to publish the journal, and the matter was left to a committee. The

friends of the Otis family desired to omit the criticism of Job Otis. The other members of the committee thought it best to publish the book with no omissions.

When the matter became fully known the members of this Yearly Meeting became divided into about two equal parties, the one party composed of the Otis family and their sympathizers, under the lead of James Otis, desired to have suppressed the criticism written by Joseph Hoag. The other party, under the lead of John King, claimed that if the journal was published at all it should be published entire. These two parties separated in 1859, and each party constituted a separate Yearly Meeting, the one with James Otis as clerk commonly known as the Otis Meeting, and the other with John King as clerk commonly called the King Meeting.

Each of these meetings sought to obtain the support and recognition of the Wilbur Meeting in New England. For several years the New England Meeting, of which Peleg Mitchell was clerk, declined to approve either the Otis or the King Meeting, as no point of doctrine or discipline was involved. It was a difficult question to decide, for if they decided that the book should be published entire, there would appear a criticism on one of their leaders. If, on the other hand, they approved the suppression, they would be discredibly covering up an important statement of an eye witness.

But in 1863 the question demanded decision, and it resulted in a division of the New England Meeting. About forty of them, a small part of the meeting, withdrew and under the leadership of Peleg Mitchell of Nantucket and Nathan Page of Danvers, formed a separate Meeting that at once approved and recognized the Otis Meeting of New York. The Wilburites that remained, recognized the King Meeting. The Nantucket Meeting as a whole was almost unanimously in favor of the Otis party. No

other New England Meeting went that way. So that there were scattered over New England on the main land, Wilburite Quakers who had favored the Otis party in New York and were not in unity with their own meetings. There was Nathan Page of Danvers, the Oliver family in Lynn, and the Foster family in Rhode Island. The Nantucket Meeting alone in New England held their views. So these persons joined the Nantucket Meeting. Thus the Nantucket Society separated itself from all other New England bodies and became in fact the only "Otis" Meeting in New England. These additions restored considerable vigor to the struggling society. For at this time it was weak and its numbers few.

But it was thought best to maintain a smaller Meeting House. When they undertook to sell the real estate they found that the property was claimed by the Center Street Meeting. So they came to an understanding and both Meetings joined in the deed, selling the whole Fair Street property to Alfred Macy. Then the Fair Street Meeting bought back the north part and transformed the school house into a meeting house. This change took place in the summer and autumn of 1864. From the beginning of the meeting, 4th mo. 28, 1708. Men and Women held separate meetings. 11 mo. 26, 1868. As their numbers had so diminished it was decided that their meetings should be held together.

In the spring of 1894 as only one member of the Meeting lived at Nantucket it was decided to sell the Meeting House. It was therefore sold in June, 1894, to the Nantucket Historical Society. At this time the membership of the Nantucket Monthly Meeting of Friends comprised twenty-three persons, only two of whom were born at Nantucket. One lived at Nantucket, one in Boston, one in Danvers, ten in Lynn, and the same number in Providence. If they had not received those additions in 1863,

the Meeting would now contain but two persons, one man and one woman, each well advanced in years.

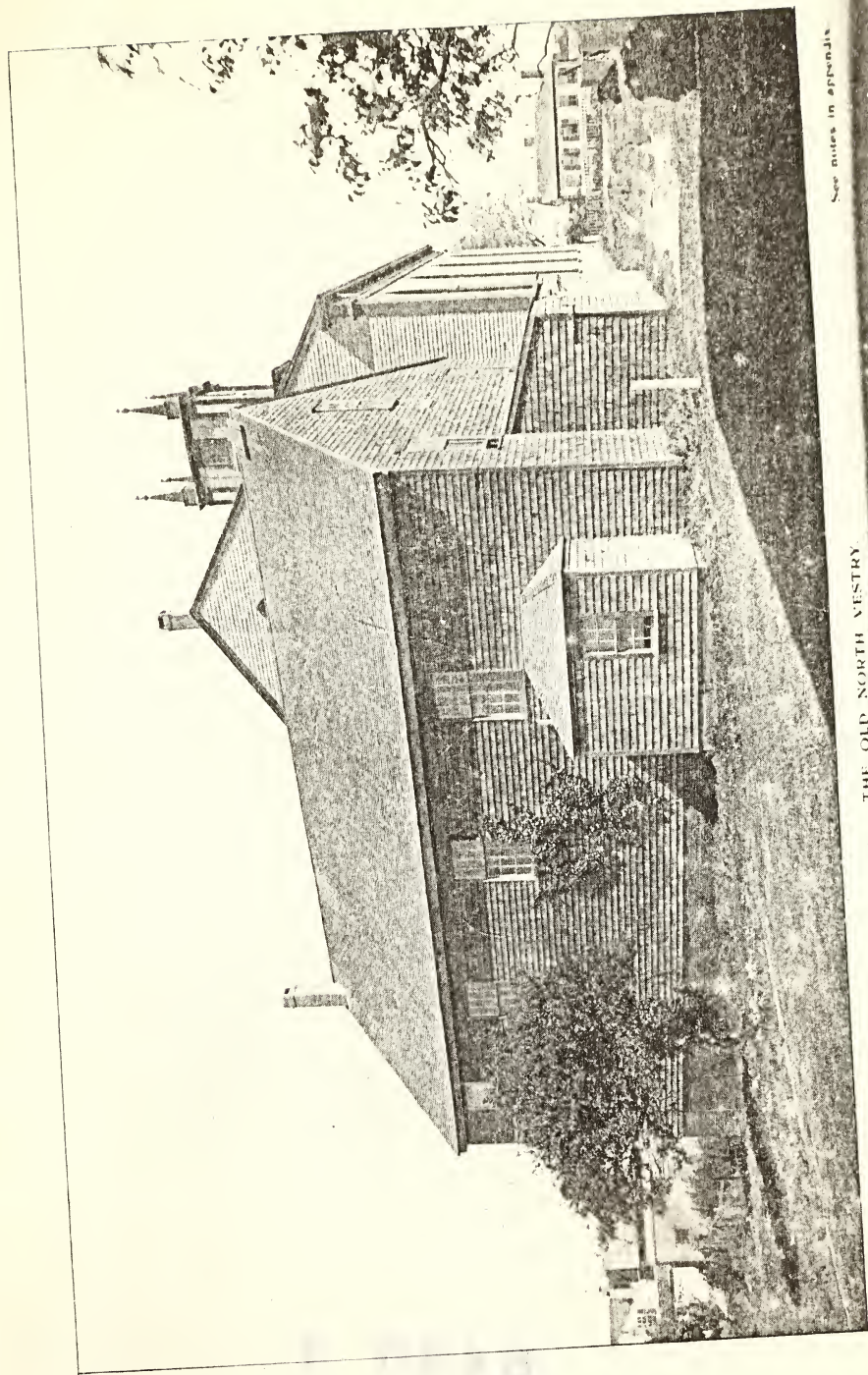
When the Meeting House was sold, the books of records, containing much valuable information about deaths, births and marriages of Nantucket people, were transported from the Island and are now in the custody of James W. Oliver in Lynn.

So the Nantucket Monthly Meeting of Friends is now a misnomer. It began at Nantucket about the year 1700 and when the year 1900 opens, there may not be left on the Island a single Friend.

The dominant members of the Nantucket Society, who controlled and directed its movements, seemed not to appreciate why the Creator painted the morning and evening sky ; colored the woods ; bestowed on the birds of the air matchless gifts of form, color and song ; caused the lilies of the field to grow in glory beyond the reach of earthly wisdom ; created man in his own image and placed him in this fair world with a mind demanding for its happiness to behold the splendors that surround him, to listen to the music that comes on the wings of the wind and in joy to open his heart in song, so they banished from human life much innocent and wholesome pleasure and forbid attention to the beauties of form, color and song. The penalty came and Friends have almost disappeared from Nantucket.

If they had adopted more liberal terms of fellowship ; if their religious services had been more varied ; if the gift of preaching had been more encouraged and less hampered ; if they had established a better proportioned theology ; if they had not obscured or undervalued any portion of Divine Truth, wherever revealed ; if they had abandoned their discipline and allowed the laws of the land to deal with offenders ; if instead of expelling members for trivial offences, they had exercised towards them a wise charity ;

if instead of maintaining their society as an organization composed of men and women who never departed from rectitude, it had been regarded as a portion of the church of Christ, in which were men and women of every degree of moral acquirements; if their beautiful system of simplicity had been built on the rock and not on sandy foundations, they might have been as vigorous today as they were a century ago.



See notes in appendix

THE OLD NORTH VESTRY

from a photograph taken

6440 1

